Honors at war’s close

Gen. Jonathan Mayhew Wainwright, right, was at the College of Puget Sound on Nov. 22, 1945, to receive the honorary degree of doctor of military science. Wainwright commanded the besieged American forces on Corregidor that held out against the Japanese invaders until May 6, 1942. At left is Dr. R. Franklin Thompson, who was in the third year of his 31-year tenure as the Tacoma school’s president. At center is Brig. Gen. Ensley M. Llewellyn, who served on Gen. Eisenhower’s staff during World War II and was a founder of the military’s Stars and Stripes newspaper. Gen. Wainwright, a native of Fort Walla Walla, Wash., would return to Tacoma on other occasions – notably Nov. 20, 1949, when he attended a ceremony renaming Regents Park School in Fircrest as Wainwright Elementary.

Holding it together – One man’s recollections of the fastener business…

Fascinating Fasteners

by Dick Amberson

When it comes to fastening things, many people don’t think beyond a paper clip or a safety pin. However, in industry and commerce, fastening items together is a vital piece of the whole. Fasteners are an interesting field – an area that took me into a variety of businesses over many years. My focus was stapling: nailing with manual, electric and air-operated fastening devices.

I worked Pierce, Thurston and Grays Harbor counties for nearly 20 years from the late 1950s to the 1970s, covering many industries. Some of the businesses I called on have vanished; others have changed considerably.

Johnny’s Seafood

Big John and Little John(1) were a couple of great guys who used my fastener machines to put together corrugated boxes. Their plant was on Dock Street,
Editor’s corner

It’s been about a year since we published the last edition of the City of Destiny Newsletter. We are sorry for the lapse. It proved impossible for your over obligated scribe to manage the exhibit center and the society’s operations and at the same time work on the newsletter. Now that the society has a paid director and the presidency has passed to the capable hands of Jim Hoard, you can expect to find the City of Destiny Newsletter in your mailbox with more regularity.

The society plans to publish separately an annual report for 2007 that will carry the names of donors to the Dr. Jerry V. Ramsey and Elaine Perdue Ramsey endowment fund, the society’s annual fund, and our premier auction.

Meanwhile, we continue to invite photos and original articles about Tacoma history. Articles do not need to be scholarly. Reminiscences about life in Tacoma in earlier times are welcome.

If you’re a lover of Tacoma history, these are times to savor. We’ve emerged from the lean years to a bumper crop of books on local history. In fact, on March 13, the Garfield Book Company at Pacific Lutheran University played host to a book signing event for three authors of Tacoma books.

The event feted Bill Evans, co-author of the new Tacoma’s Proctor District; Mike Stork, author of Foss Maritime Company; and Chuck Fowler, who wrote Tall Ships on Puget Sound. (Yes, it does include many Tacoma harbor scenes.) All three books are part of Arcadia Publishing’s “Images of America” series.

We can look forward to more books about our corner of the world. Fox Island, by Bill Edgers, was recently released. The Mosquito Fleet of South Puget Sound, co-authored by Robin Paterson and Jean Findlay, will be issued soon. The authors of Tacoma’s Parks, Melissa McGinnis and Doreen Beard-Simpkins, have prepared a second book, this one on Wright Park and its neighborhood. Morgan Alexander has begun work on Tacoma’s streetcars and the changes they brought about.

Don’t think that all the work has been done. Darlyne Reiter filled a real gap in the record with South Tacoma. Fern Hill needs a similar book; so does the Hilltop. And the list could go on. – DRW

Tacoma Historical Society names Mary Bowlby Director

The Tacoma Historical Society has announced the appointment of Mary Bowlby as its director. Her responsibilities include management of the Society’s exhibit center at 747 Broadway, exhibit planning, and community relations.

Bowlby formerly was administrator of Tacoma’s Working Waterfront Maritime Museum and curatorial assistant for Bremerton’s Puget Sound Naval Museum. A Pierce County native, she is a graduate of Aquinas Academy and the University of Washington Tacoma. She also holds a certificate in non-profit management.

“We are extremely fortunate to have a museum professional join us as the Director of the Society,” said Dr. Jim Hoard, the society’s president.

The society also announced the election of two new board members, former City Council member Thomas R. Stenger and Dan Patjens, Senior Vice President of Columbia Bank.

The Tacoma Historical Writers invite your participation

2nd & 4th Tuesdays 1:30 to 3:00

Enjoy coffee, cookies and conversation about local history. All are welcome.

1814 Skyline Drive • 253-752-7722

Mysteries:

• What became of the 90-foot-by-60-foot flag that hung on the Perkins Building, 11th and A streets, on Nov. 11, 1918, the day World War I ended? 253-752-7722.

• At South First and St. Helens, there’s a pocket-size park called Norton Memorial. The monument there was erected in 1902 to honor civic leader Percy Dunbar Norton (1856-1900). Citizens felt that Norton had worked himself to death at the relatively young age of 44 to save Tacoma from financial disaster. It’s fairly evident that there was a plaque on the monument.

Doe anyone have a record of what was inscribed there? info@tacomahistory.org or 253-472-3738
Auction proves to be MARQUEE EVENT FOR THS

“An auction? We’ve never done one before. We wouldn’t know where to begin.”

The Tacoma Historical Society board sailed into uncharted waters in 2007 when it decided to stage our inaugural auction.

Doubt gave way to enthusiasm as a date was selected (Oct. 14), a historic venue chosen (The Landmark Convention Center), and a theme decided upon, (“Going, Going … Saved.”)

Board members Jerry Ramsey and Deb Freedman led the way. Limiting auction items to a Tacoma connection helped generate publicity and community buzz.

More than 130 people turned out. The society netted more than $13,000. And as members and guests were leaving, often with their arms full, the conversation had already started about the 2008 auction.

Deb Freedman, auction committee chair, keeps things moving. Dr. Jerry Ramsey, auction emcee, enjoys a pause with his assistant, Arin Costanza. Photos by Elaine Ramsey

Visit the THS Exhibit Center & Store

Where Tacoma’s History Is Celebrated
747 Broadway – in Tacoma’s Old City Hall Historic District

Noon to 5 pm Wed—Sat
253-472-3738

“The John Graham Collection – Tacoma History in Post Cards” offers well over 100 views of early-day Tacoma.
* Both exhibits curated by Dr. Jim Hoard.

The THS store offers:
• Herbert Hunt’s classic History of Tacoma – republished in 2005 with an improved, expanded index. Four-volume set.
• Vintage photos of historic Tacoma
• Coffee mugs with the THS logo
• Prints and mugs by Tacoma artist Anne deMille Flood
• Prints and posters by Tacoma artist Marshall Johnson
• And more…

Remember: THS members receive a 10 percent discount by showing their cards.
Master Card and Visa accepted.

In memoriam: Donald F. Olson, artist, engineer, and director of the Camp 6 Logging Museum, died Jan. 5 at the age of 86. He was author of Logging Retrospective: Don Olson’s Oil Paintings.
Waterfront landmark remembered

Sculptor Paul R. Michaels and the monument he crafted to remember a vanished Tacoma landmark, the Top of the Ocean restaurant. The unique and popular eatery graced the Ruston Way waterfront from 1945 until it was torched by an arsonist in 1977, Babe Lehrer headed the $20,000 fund-raising campaign for THS. Some 250 people turned out for the dedication on Oct. 28, 2007.

Mason Plaza will honor visionary Tacoman, provide gathering place

No one foresaw Tacoma’s destiny more clearly than Allen C. Mason. Mason embraced the phrase, The City of Destiny, well over 100 years ago and promoted the city as a wonderful place to live and do business.

And it’s Mason’s spirit of community that’s behind the Mason Plaza project, says Joe Quilici, who is heading the fund campaign for the Proctor District Association. “Together, we are building a new public plaza in the North End—one that honors our local heritage and reminds us of Mason’s early vision for Tacoma.”

Mason was described by The News Tribune as “a Tacoma pioneer when others saw this place as a woody wilderness.” The Illinois schoolteacher and chicken farmer came to Tacoma in 1883 and launched his business with only $2.85 in his pocket. By the 1890s, his developments and investments had turned him into a multi-millionaire. Along the way, he promoted Tacoma more than any other person, advertising the city’s advantages in East Coast papers through a dazzling illustration he called Tacoma’s Star of Destiny.

Mason built the first streetcar line from downtown, through the Proctor District on North 26th, and on to Point Defiance Park—the same Route 11 used by Pierce Transit today.

He was the principal developer of Tacoma’s North End. He donated the city’s first public library. In the panic of 1893, Mason personally bought back houses from anyone who asked, losing all his fortune in the process.

On the southeast corner of North 26th and Adams Street stands a 100-year-old oak tree at Wheelock Public Library, a living reminder of Tacoma’s past and a fitting location for Mason Plaza.

The space will be framed by six sandstone columns, salvaged from Mason’s own 1890s mansion, which was razed in 1922 to make way for the Weyerhaeuser Mansion (Haddaway Hall). A life-size bronze statue of Mason, top hat firmly in place, will welcome visitors. A five-foot-diameter, bronze re-creation of Mason’s Star of Destiny will be the plaza’s centerpiece, serving as one of the very few public interpretive places of Tacoma’s history.

Paul R. Michaels has been selected as sculptor for the project.

The Tacoma Historical Society has endorsed the $272,000 project and is serving as financial agent. Tax-deductible contributions may be sent to THS, PO Box 1865, Tacoma, WA 98401.
MONUMENTAL UNDERTAKINGS

Overdue, but now in place...

World War II memorial dedicated on Veterans Day

It took years of research and fund raising, under the leadership of Charlotte Medlock, but a granite monument bearing 760 names of Pierce County war dead is now in place at Tacoma’s War Memorial Park, Highway 16 and Jackson Avenue.

Some 200 people were on hand for the dedication and presentation Nov. 11, 2007.

The list of names was painstakingly assembled by Charlotte Medlock and other Tacoma Historical Society volunteers over the last several years.

Dr. Dale R. Wirsing, then president of THS, presented the monument to Mayor William Baarsma, who accepted it on behalf of the City of Tacoma.

Speakers were Lourdes Alvarado-Ramos, deputy director, Wash. State Department of Veterans Affairs, and James Wells, World War II veteran and past commander, American Ex-POW; and Laurie Kastenbaum, daughter of Lawrence Martin Ganes, a fallen World War II serviceman.

The Tacoma Historical Society Memorial Monument Committee was made up of Lt. Col. (ret.) Robert Campbell; Col. (ret.) Alphonso Knight Jr.; Dr. Ronald E. Magden; Charlotte Medlock; and Capt. (ret.) R. Leonard Medlock.

Major contributors were the Ben B. Cheney Foundation; Frances Heidner Fund; the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation; Pierce County Council; USO-Puget Sound Area; Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs; and West End Neighborhood Council, Tacoma.

A new monument honoring Pierce County’s World War II dead is now in place at Tacoma’s War Memorial Park, where the Narrows Bridges and the Olympic Mountains form a scenic backdrop.

Plan for the inaugural Memorial Day service in Tacoma’s War Memorial Park, May 24, 2008, at 3 p.m.  The event is sponsored by the Tacoma Historical Society and American Legion Post 2.  War Memorial Park is at 6th Avenue and MacArthur Street (near the Narrows Bridge).  253-752-7722.

Sculptor plans to re-create downtown’s lost icon

In 1885, when the Tacoma was a promise-filled frontier city, the city fathers and mothers built the Chamber of Commerce Building at 1201 Pacific Ave.  They had the good sense to see to it that a sculpture was on the very top of a four-story building.

There she stood – a 14-foot copper sculpture of the Goddess of Commerce of Tacoma.  She was an icon of the city for many years – until 1950, when the building was torn down and the once-proud sculpture was recycled for the copper.

Dan Voelpel, News Tribune business columnist, revived interest in this almost forgotten icon with several articles in 2004 and 2005.

Now, Tacoma artist Marilyn Mahoney is working on re-creating the Goddess of Commerce.  The Tacoma Historical Society has endorsed the $67,000 project and is serving as the financial agent.  Babe Lehrer is heading the fund-raising effort.  Tax-deductible contributions may be sent to THS, PO Box 1865, Tacoma, WA 98401.

The symbols for the creation on the new goddess sculpture reflect both old and new symbolism.  They are the following:  her face reflects a more Native American appearance reflective of original people of Tacoma; her dress that of a pioneer woman; her right hand holding a model of the city of Tacoma as it is today; in the other hand holding a model of a freighter representing industry of today; her earrings are cranes representing the Port of Tacoma; and down her back the cascading salmon vanishing into the ocean.
but closer to the 11th Street Bridge than it is now. Every morning, Little John would telephone his restaurant accounts to take their orders for the seafood they needed. Big John was Greek and loved to share his fondness for Greek food. The recipe he gave me for pickled herring was used over and over, much to the delight of my friends and family.

Johnny’s Restaurant
Johnny’s Seafood was not to be confused with Johnny’s Dock Restaurant owned by Johnny Meaker. Meaker had a chef named Walt who dreamed up and created great spices. At first they sold the spices just at the restaurant on the dock. Later they manufactured them in a little plant over by what is now the Tacoma Dome. Walt gave me a sample of his Salad Elegance once, and I’ve used it ever since.

Meat Plant
Art Marush had a wholesale meat facility near Johnny’s plant. He made hamburger patties, put them in boxes and shipped them to local restaurants. He used my machine to fasten the boxes.

Fairliner Boats
The Fairliner boat plant was on East 11th. I sold my products there too: heavy-duty stapling and nailing machines to hold boats together.

Tacoma Boat
And then, of course, there was Tacoma Boat on Foss Waterway, where they used to build the tuna clippers. They called me in once to see if I could solve a pesky problem. The tuna clippers rested on wooden wedges, and as the boat slid down the ways, the hundreds of wooden wedges were cast adrift, creating a mess throughout the waterway. I took a long rope and fastened it to each wedge with a heavy-duty, galvanized staple so after the boat was launched we could retrieve all the wedges simply by pulling in the rope. I was invited to the launching ceremony!

Concrete Boat Hulls
On the east side of the Tideflats is Marine View Drive. There were a number of boat yards over there, and an idea was being developed for a boat hull to be made of concrete. Wire mesh was formed into the shape of the hull and then concrete was sprayed into the mesh. Hog-ring staples were used to hold the mesh together. A sailboat hull was completed, but it just sat there for months and months and I don’t know what ever happened to it. Maybe when they launched it, it sank.

Writing On Wet Paper
Another idea was developed by an inventive guy on Browns Point. Paper you can write on—even when it’s wet. The fellow’s name was Jerry Darling. He called me one day to see if I could solve a fastening problem. He was proud of his idea: “Ever try to write on paper when it’s wet?” he asked. “Who needs to?” I wondered. But he went on to explain that lots of people have the need: surveyors, contractors, field workers – anyone who works outside. He must’ve been right. His little company (the J.L. Darling Co.) – that he started in his basement in Browns Point – now occupies an imposing building in Fife.

Marine View Drive and the Tideflats
The Olympia Reserve Fleet consisted of old (World War II) Liberty Ships anchored in Olympia. By the 1960s, they were all considered scrap material. The scrapping was accomplished in the Hylebos Waterway over by Marine View Drive. The project took several years and, in the process, several naval ships were also scrapped; including at least one aircraft carrier.

The Tideflats was a very different sort of place then. There were many businesses there. One, Waterside Milling Co., was a firm I called on. The man’s name was Don Dightman, a great guy. I never sold him much, but he always treated me with respect and I respected him as well. Eventually, the business faded away and Don went on to found a Bible bookstore on South 38th Street.

Not far away, Sabre Craft and Bell Boy boats were manufactured. These were some of the early fiberglass boats. They also made boats of plywood—one of which was a 26-foot cruiser called V2600.

Hygrade’s packing house was down on the Tideflats. It was an old building that has long since been torn down. I was calling on Don Furse, the purchasing agent, one day when I heard the most blood-curdling screaming I’d ever experienced. It really scared me, but Don didn’t change expression. He told me not to worry—it was simply hog-kill day.

(1) “Little John” Gerontis and his partner, “Big John” Cologerou, established a fish business on the City Waterway, now known as Thea Foss Waterway.
Dry Cleaner Tags

Dry cleaners attach little tags to the clothing. They use stapling pliers and sometimes foot-operated staplers for this purpose. Don Harter had a shop up on St. Helens Avenue and I liked to call on him. A great guy with a fine sense of humor.

Christmas Season

What ever happened to Christmas holly? There used to be a number of holly growers around. One was out in Puyallup, owned by Korum, the same guy who sold cars. His farm was south of Puyallup, near what developed into the South Hill Mall. Every year at Christmas-time there were people there using staples to assemble wreaths that were shipped all over the country. There was also a pharmacist, Wayne Moseby, who had a drugstore in Federal Way and a holly farm in Burien. Another farm was near Olympia on the Shelton highway. They all tried to be uniform in how they shipped holly, the boxes they used and how they were fashioned. They had an association with an office in the Perkins Building on A Street. But I haven’t seen holly for sale anywhere for years.

Christmas was a busy time for me. The Christmas tree business involved a tag on the lower branches of the tree to identify the tree as to species and price. I got a call one day from a grower in Shelton who desperately needed supplies. I packed up what he needed, went out to Oswald Airport in Fircrest, and hopped into a Piper Tripacer aircraft. The grower’s wife drove her jeep to meet me at the Shelton Airport a half hour later.

Center Street

On the way to Oswald Airport you would drive out Center Street, which used to be home to several interesting businesses. One was a factory where they made corn brooms. A worker would put the broom handle into this big clunky machine with arms going back and forth, sewing the straw to the broomstick. And another rig wrapped wire around it to hold it together. You wouldn’t believe the racket!

Nowadays when you light the barbecue you get one of those propane gadgets that looks like a pistol. But in the old days you used wooden matches. Out on Union Avenue near Center Street was Pacific Match Company, and that’s what they made—wooden matches. The wooden part was pine, I think. Very dry and straight-grained. A machine made the matchstick, and the end was dipped in some sulfur stuff and then the very end, the part that ignited the match, was applied. Then the finished matches were put in little boxes, you may remember, that had sandpaper on the side to strike the match. At the match plant safety was a big concern.

DuPont

Safety was a big concern out in DuPont also, as you would expect at a dynamite plant. The DuPont plant made explosives that were used in mining and blowing up stumps. It was very remote and isolated with each operation conducted in a separate building. There used to be a dock not far from Steilacoom where boats would bring in materials for the dynamite plant… Down in Tenino, the Pacific Powder Co.’s main office was a little run-down place on the main street.

Puyallup Valley

Out in the Puyallup Valley I did business with a number of farmers. Hot-house rhubarb was a big deal around Sumner. Certified strawberry plants, fresh daffodils and tulips, bulbs, lettuce—all of these required some sort of packaging. I also called on the packing houses, where they put up raspberries, strawberries, etc. The old cannery which is now a furniture store in Sumner packed these things for years.

Furniture Manufacturing

Furniture manufacturing was very strong in Tacoma. F.S. Harmon made mattresses, upholstery and case-goods in two plants—one out on Center Street, the other on Pacific Avenue. The company closed some years ago but the building now houses a yuppie brewery on the first floor, businesses above the brewery and lofts on the top floor. And, of course, there was Northwest Chair on South Tacoma Way, Fisher Chair also on South Tacoma Way, Slyter Chair on Cedar Street, and a number of others.

Nalley Valley

George Nalley, I was told, didn’t care much for executive life. He had a dump truck which he used to dispose of rotten pickles. One day, so I was told, he got mad, dumped a load right in the street, and then went home. A great story anyway!

Dick Amberson ran the Tacoma office of Bostitch, a large industrial fastener supplier, from 1955 to 1975. Fellow volunteers at Tacoma’s Working Waterfront Maritime Museum persuaded him to write down his recollections of Tacoma businesses that operated at that time. He is a wooden boat enthusiast and a longtime Federal Way resident.
TACOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Regular meetings

April 14, 2008 – Monday, 6:30 pm
Bates Technical College, downtown campus

THS Annual Meeting
Melissa McGinnis, Doreen Beard Simpkins, “Wright Park”
Alan Liddle Award, Murray Morgan Award announcement

May 3rd & 4th
Historic Homes of Tacoma Tour

June 9, 2008 – Mon., 7 pm  Tacoma Public Library
“Tall Ships on Puget Sound”
Chuck Fowler, former director of Tacoma’s Working
Waterfront Maritime Museum, and author of the newly
published “Images of America” book on the era of sail
on the Sound.

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